

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Advent - Year B
St. Peter's 10/12/5 Masses - December 20, 2020

2 Sam 7:1-16 "The Lord will make you a house, raise up your offspring to establish his kingdom."

Psalm 89 "I have made a covenant with my servant David. He shall cry: You are my Father."

Romans 16:25-27 "The revelation of the mystery that was kept secret is now disclosed."

Luke 1:26-38 "You will bear a son. The Lord will give him the throne of his father, David."

What's On Your List?

Introduction

Most of us use lists to keep on top of things we have to do: Grocery lists, Christmas card lists, bucket lists i.e. things to do before we die, and I know there are people who even have lists to keep track of the lists.

David

King David's To Do list would be pretty interesting: Finally take control of Jerusalem, defeat aggressive neighbour kings, build a royal castle, don't forget to worship God and - the subject of today's really important Old Testament passage - build a temple, a house, for the Ark of the Covenant, for God's presence.

Then there is the royal prophet, Nathan. He's got a To Do List: Listen to God's voice, especially when I'm dreaming, prophecy doom to people when they worship idols and, way up there on the list, give the king good and holy advice from God and, especially, give him the go ahead for that 'house for God' idea of his. Sounds like a good one.

But, you know, there is no list, no matter how good we think it is, that shouldn't be harmonized with what God has in mind to do. That starts with:

Create the cosmos from nothing, create life from nothing, sustain all creation in existence, reveal myself to people over the centuries, slowly enough so they can get it, not so fast that they feel overwhelmed, letting them know in many ways that I created them to share my blessed life with them.

But God had a very specific 'To Do list' for the situation in today's passage:

1. Appear in a dream to Nathan.
2. Send him to the king with a few lists of my own to put David in his place.

Here is the conversation between Nathan and the king. It is a reminder of the list of things God had done for David. He says: I took you from following sheep. I made you the prince over my people (not your people). I have conquered all your enemies. I have been with you everywhere, including when you cut off Goliath's head and when I kept King Saul from killing you.

Then there is the list of what David had done for God without God's strength: Almost nothing. You know, that's a reminder for us. Without God, what we can accomplish in the world, while it can seem amazing to us, is really pretty limited. We do our best as individuals and as a society. We come up with technological gadgets. We try to keep our enemies at bay, even the tiny microbial ones.

The gods of history never make covenants. They act primarily in their own self interest. They don't promise anything. They meddle, often with violence. Most of all, gods invented by humans never prophecy great things that will happen in the future.

But the God of the whole cosmos makes an astounding promise to the one he has made king over his people. He tells him: Stop your foolishness. You are not going to build a house for me, for I cannot be contained in a

building. No, but I am going to build you a house - a dynasty - that will last forever. Your descendent will be my Son, and his throne, his house, will last forever.

Gabriel

God is patient. God is the master of history. God is the one whose plan for our salvation is assured, never in doubt. Prophets and angels throughout time announce this to humans over and over.

Now, when we look at what archangels do, I imagine they are pretty busy. I don't think God wastes the power he gave them when he created them. In the history of God's saving his people, Archangel Gabriel appears occasionally to prophets. But when the time is right for God to fulfill his sacred oath to David, Gabriel announces the birth of John the Baptist to his father, Zechariah. And now, he comes to Mary with the news that the time has come. The time is full. The time is right for God to do what he promised a thousand years earlier.

Mary

Mary had a lot on her mind, already. She was engaged to Joseph, thinking about how her life was going to go. Then, very dramatically, God's holiest angel presents her with the most important list any human being, except the God-man, Jesus, has ever been given: You are going to conceive. You are going to bear a son. You are going to name him Jesus and, by the way, you and Joseph are going to raise the saviour of the world, the king who will sit on the throne that God promised to David, Joseph's ancestor, a thousand years ago, that Isaiah prophesied 700 years ago, that many prophets have foretold since then.

Mary had only the most natural question: How will that work with Joseph? But when she recovers her breath, as it were, her childlike trust in God

takes over. All she needs to hear is the truth from the great Good News messenger, Gabriel: Nothing is impossible with God.

Jesus

Through Advent, we have been encouraged to reflect quietly on our lives and to make room in our hearts again for the coming of Jesus, the saviour. reflection. Whether we have done these things or not, it is now the right time to look forward to the coming of the light. As John says at the beginning of his Gospel, that is the light that shines in the darkness, that the darkness cannot overcome.

We light four candles today to be a reminder that the light was promised by God. The promise of that light was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, foretold to David, announced by Gabriel, carried out through Mary, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. That true light is now just waiting to come again into our darkness. Every Christmas light, every candle, even the light of the morning sun, all testify to the coming of that light which we must now, with Mary, invite into the centre of our hearts.

A To Do List For Life

A priest named Fr Joshua told a story in a homily, about when he was a young boy at Christmas time, eager for a Transformers action figure. His parents had a rule that he couldn't get out of bed until 5 a.m. to wake them up and open gifts. But young Joshua couldn't stand it, so at 4 a.m. he snuck down to the tree to have a look. One present was marked with, "To Joshua." Against his better judgment, he peeled back a little bit of the wrapping paper and saw the Transformers figure he had hoped for.

He put the wrapping paper back together and snuck back upstairs. Then, about an hour later, he woke up his parents and headed downstairs. Much to all their surprise, they found no presents, and only a note from Santa

explaining that, because Joshua had peaked, Santa had taken back all the presents.

Well, little Joshua had never cried so hard in his life. It turned out it was all a joke by Joshua's brother, Mark, because he saw Joshua peeking. The presents came back out. Then Fr Wagner joked that "The unfortunate end of that story is that we haven't seen my brother Mark since."

Fr Wagner used the story to explain that, during Advent, Christians wait in eager anticipation for the gift of Christmas, the coming of Jesus. It's still Advent so it is not quite time to open the present of Jesus' birth.

However, unlike with presents of toys and gadgets, it's OK for us to take a sneak peek. God wants us to anticipate what he has promised. And it's a present he'll never ever take away from us.

Prepare the way in your heart. Get rid of what keeps you from doing that. We are heirs to his sacred oath, his covenant promise. Jesus says "unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." You and I need to cultivate that intensity, that childlike longing for the coming of Jesus.

The candles are lit. There is more and more light. We get closer and closer to the light that illumines our hearts and gives us hope. We need Christ to be the light of the world. What is the list of what God has done for us? Every blessed thing. That's what he promises and that is what he does. This week, make it the only 'must do' thing on your To Do list. Enter into the covenant promise. Receive the light of Christ. Keep it burning brightly in your life.

Key Verses Today

2 Samuel: *David, the king, was settled in his house. The Lord had given him rest from his enemies. The king said to the prophet Nathan: I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent. Nathan said: Go, do all that you have in mind, for the Lord is with you. But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Tell my servant David: Are you the one to build me a house? I took you from following sheep to be prince over my people Israel. I have been with you everywhere and have cut off all your enemies. The Lord will make you a house and will raise up your offspring and establish his kingdom. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom (throne) shall be made sure forever.*

Psalms: *I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever. You said: I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to my servant David, I will establish your descendants forever and build your throne for all generations. He shall cry to me: You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.*

Romans: *The Gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles.*

Luke: *The Angel Gabriel was sent by God, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you. She pondered this greeting. The angel said: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus, the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David. Of his kingdom there will be no end. Mary said: How can this be, since I am a virgin? The Angel said: The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be holy. He will be called son of God.*